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NOVEMBER 2022

From Outrage to Opportunity:

How to Include The
Missing Perspectives
of Women of All Colors
in News Leadership
and Coverage

The third in the series of Missing Perspectives reports



The report at a glance

Executive summary

The perception that women have almost caught up with men in news leadership and coverage strengthens further with every high-profile editorial appointment of a woman in journalism. Nonetheless, this perception is wrong. **Women are significantly underrepresented in editorial leadership roles and news coverage and their voices remain muted in a global news industry still dominated by men. However, substantive opportunities to reshape the status quo are emerging.**

This independent, solutions-based report, the third in the *Missing Perspectives* series, focuses on **how to break down two fundamental barriers**, previously identified, **that women face**: their **underrepresentation and cultural exclusion in news leadership** at the top of news organizations/in the highest-profile beats (the subject of **Part 1**); and their **invisibility in news coverage/storytelling** (the subject of **Part 2**).

The report findings are based on research in the same six countries featured in previous reports: India, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK, and the US. The AKAS team has accessed millions of data points from multiple quantitative methodologies to derive insights and formulate solutions. This time, however, we also conducted in-depth interviews with 41 senior news editors/editors-in-chief and trailblazers from around the world to understand the root causes of and, importantly, the palpable solutions to removing these two key barriers to progress.

When tackling this longstanding issue of women's missing perspectives in news, organizations and leaders often expect to identify a silver bullet, a quick fix that can solve the problem. **The truth is: there is no silver bullet.** While hiring more women leaders is an imperative starting point, it is simply not enough to resolve the issue. To accelerate change, women's **missing or muted voices must be amplified at each stage of the news value chain**: i.e. in news leadership and newsrooms, in newsgathering, in news coverage, and in news consumption. Moreover, **to improve gender and racial equity in news, organizations should drive change at the individual level**, as typically happens now, but also **at two other levels: the systemic and organizational** (see **Part 3**).

Provided this strategic approach is adopted, **our investigation into the business case for gender equality shows** a potential cumulative revenue opportunity of \$43 billion between 2023 and 2027 and \$83 billion between 2023 and 2032 for the global newspaper industry if the 11-12 percentage point addressable gender consumption gap was completely closed. Realistically, the gap could only be closed incrementally. If each year the gap was reduced by one percentage point, **over the next five years new women audiences would generate \$11 billion and over ten years \$38 billion** (see **Part 4, Chapter 2**).

Three new insights require the news industry's urgent attention:

Firstly, women are still very much on the margins of editorial decision-making in the highest-profile news beats. For every woman who is an editor-in-chief, there are between two (in South Africa, the US and the UK) and 12 (in Indian regional news outlets) male editors-in-chief. Across the key beats of business, politics, and foreign affairs, women hold as few as 1 in 6 editorial roles in the countries researched. Occasional instances of parity (e.g. in South African political editors or in US business editors) are counterbalanced by exclusively male leadership (e.g. among Kenyan and Indian regional political editors) (see **Part 1, Chapters 1 to 6**).

Secondly, women news leaders of color suffer extraordinary marginalization in countries with multi-racial populations i.e. South Africa, the UK, and the US. This is a news industry blind spot. AKAS' research showed that women of color are often completely locked out of editorial decision-making in the highest-profile beats. In all three countries examined, their representation is significantly below their proportion in the working population. In the UK, no people of color occupy the most senior editorial decision-making positions in politics and health news beats and no women of color occupy the most senior editorial positions in foreign affairs beats. Only 3% of political and 4% of foreign affairs editors in the US are women of color. Even in South Africa, just 29% of political editors are women of color, while their proportion in the working population is 46% (see **Part 1, Chapters 2-6**). These troubling findings were backed up by our interviews, which revealed that the harrowing experiences of women of color are mostly a test of endurance, and the enormous challenges they face demand immediate action (see **Part 1, Chapter 7**). Currently news leadership teams are either unaware, reactive, pushing back, or turning a blind eye to the problem. Moreover, women of color's representation or cultural inclusion in news organizations is simply not tracked. Only 2% of the diversity reports

produced by news organizations across South Africa, the UK, and the US release statistics on women of color (see **Part 5**).

Thirdly, there is a huge gap in the coverage of issues that affect women disproportionately. A meagre 0.02% of news coverage globally focuses on seven substantive gaps between men and women in pay, power, safety, authority, confidence, health, and ageism. The scarce coverage of the health gap is particularly worrying given women's parity in editorial decision-making in that beat. The existing male-favoring news-making norms, which transcend the gender of the editors, obscure women-sensitive story angles (see **Part 2**). To widen the storytelling lens, women's inclusion in editorial decision-making and as news contributors must improve dramatically. *"Just [having women in] many leadership positions is not the only solution. You need women's voices to be heard, and, when women are in leadership positions, for them to be in meaningful positions."* How to achieve that has been a significant focus of this study (see **Part 1, Chapters 7-9**).

Optimistically, the **report outlines 12 solutions themes that are available not only to change the status quo and improve women's representation and inclusion in news leadership, but also to create more balanced, and inclusive news coverage that engages more female and racially-diverse audiences** (see **Summary of solutions themes**). A latent revenue opportunity is waiting to be unlocked through more gender-inclusive journalism that engages more female audiences (see **Part 1, Chapter 9 and Part 2, Chapter 3**). Trailblazing organizations, nine of which are profiled in this report, including some of the world's largest news organizations such as Bloomberg, the Guardian and The New York Times, are making progress already. Drop by drop the river rises. Every one percentage point change along any element of the news value chain, starting with a gender audit, will bring news organizations a small step closer to a more equitable and profitable journalism. To learn more, read the report...